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ABSTRACT

Data for this study was provided by the survey of a random sample of adults in North Carolina which was conducted by the Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in mid-1971. Responses to a question in the interview about public library use are analyzed here, together with data on characteristics which may provide clues on user needs: age, level of education, use of media, expectations about one's own outcome in life, and attitudes about government and other social institutions. Of the 1008 usable responses, 243 were "public library users" and 765 "non-users." This study indicates that the library user population in North Carolina is characteristically young, white, mobile, well-educated, and relatively well-to-do financially, with a positive and active approach to politics. The survey also showed that among the majority of those polled who are "non-users," there is a disproportionately large number of blacks and senior citizens. (Author/AP)

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A STUDY OF

PUBLIC LIBRARY PATRONS

IN NORTH CAROLINA

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north carolina's public library clientele

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by Ray L. Carpenter

2

INTRODUCTION

The development and planning of public library collections and services depend in large part on knowledge of the public to be served. As the understanding of human behavior has grown, so has the interest in and need for knowledge of specific human traits as they are related to actual or potential use of the library. While it is still not possible to match highly specific human traits with specific uses of the library in a comprehensive fashion, there are many features of human behavior that enrich our understanding of the potential of the library for the public. Some features or traits, such as age and level of education, provide reasonably, if very general, direct clues about user needs. Other traits are less clear to us as to their importance in direct application of library planning; but, nonetheless, serve as highly useful sensitizers or indicators. Such "indirect" traits include the use of media (newspapers, television, etc.), expectations about one's own outcome in life, and attitudes about government and other social institutions.

A large number of surveys from the past several decades have provided the foundations for seeking clues among the host of human traits that are keys to library use. This report incorporates several of the now standard features of such surveys and introduces some that are less common. All, hopefully, are presented in such a way as to make the links between human behavior and library use clear.

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Background. In mid-1971 the Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, conducted a sample survey of the people of North Carolina, incorporating dozens of variables. Happily, they included a question in the interview about use of the public library. Their generosity extended further in providing considerable assistance in extracting and analyzing data for this study.

Ms. Renee Gledhill-Earley, Research Assistant in the School of Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and now a graduate librarian, assisted by providing critical skills and judgment in gathering the data for this report from the enormous general survey. This report includes only those variables considered relevant to public library use and constitutes a small fraction of the data compiled for a great number of special social scientific purposes.

The tables and analytical or descriptive comments are based on interview responses. Those respondents who claimed to use the public library, regardless of the frequency of their use, are described in comparison with those who do not use the library. All respondents were "heads of households", or other adults. In effect, the report is not of library users alone, but of a random sample of the entire population of North Carolina, including library users. However, the interviewers spoke only with heads of households or another adult. Consequently, that large portion of the library clientele who are by virtue of being too young to be "heads of households" are not directly represented. Our focus, then, is on the adults of North Carolina. The sample consisted of just over a thousand usable responses—243 were "public library users" and 765 "non-users." Where there is any significant departure from these numbers (some questions were answered by less than the entire sample) the percent of "no answer" is specified. In some tables the percentage total will be a bit less or more than 100% due to rounding. The professional expertise of the distinguished Institute for Research in Social Science permits us to have little doubt about the validity of the data gathering and sampling procedures. Checks on various basic ratios or proportions in other sources confirm our trust in the data.

In any event, our first conclusion is at hand: about 24% of the adult population of North Carolina uses the public library, a figure quite reasonable in the light of comparable studies within the State and in other states. The range of use by this 24% is considerable, of course, from "about once a year" to "more than once a month," by our best estimates.

Socioeconomic Status

Age and Marital Status. Table 1 tells us the ages of those who were interviewed and reflects only *adult* library use or non-use age structure. Namely, among people 20 years and older, the library user population is a young one compared with non-users. Over one-half of the library user population is under 40 years old, while barely a third of the non-users are in this age group. Furthermore, the "old age", senior population of the State is sorely unrepresented among the library's patrons.

TABLE I

AGE

Age Group in Years	Users	Non-Users
Less than 20	1%	0.1%
20's	25	19
30's	28	15
40's	21	20
50's	12	21
60's	7	15
70's or older	5	10

The marital status comparisons in Table 2 follow logically enough, given the age characteristics of library users. The major differences between users and non-users are among those "widowed" who are likely to be older, and among those single, never married, who are likely to be younger.

TABLE 2

MARITAL STATUS

	Users	Non-Users
Married	73%	74%
Widowed	8	14
Separated, divorced, etc.	7	6
Single, never married	12	6

Sex and Race. While it is hardly surprising to find that women use the library far more often than men, it is possible that some shift in the sex ratio is occurring. Namely, earlier studies have shown even a lower percentage of males as library users.

The racial breakdown, included in Table 3, is perhaps not as encouraging (we have little available data to compare), as is evidenced by the quite low percentage of black users. Considering the negligible services to black persons not many years ago, the percentage shows great improvement. In the next few years, given rising educational levels and library support, the race ratio may well come into a more appropriate balance. [Because of their fundamental importance, the distributions of age (above and below 40 years), sex and race were analyzed with chi-square tests. Results show statistical significance at the .05 level.]

TABLE 3

SEX AND RACE

	Users	Non-Users
Male	37%	46%
Female	63	54
White	84%	78%
Black	13	20
Indian, Other	3	2

Education, Income, Social Class. Higher than average educational achievement and income have been a seemingly constant characteristic of public library users, and the dramatic differences between users and non-users in North Carolina continue to mark the library's clientele as far better educated and far more affluent. The median number of years of education (half attained less, half more) is hardly short of startling. On the average, users are the equivalent of graduates of junior college, while non-users have less than a high school education. One-third of users are college graduates (or beyond) in comparison with 4% of non-users. Over half of non-users do not have the equivalent of a high school education, compared with only 16% of users.

TABLE 4

EDUCATION

Years/Grade Completed	Users	Non-Users
Less than 9th Grade	4%	37%
9-11 years	12	25
12 years	27	26
Completed 1-3 years college	25	8
Completed B.A. or higher	34	4
Median years of education	14 years	10 years

Income differences are as markedly great. Nearly three times as many users as non-users have a before-tax income of $15,000 or more, while less than half as many users as non-users earn less than $5000 a year. Users' median annual income is nearly 60% higher than that of non-users.

TABLE 5

INCOME

Income	Users	Non-Users
Less than $5000	17%	37%
$5000-9900	28	32
$10,000-14,900	23	13
$15,000 or more	21	8
Don't know, etc.	11	10
Median Income	$11,200	$7,100

Education and income are excellent indicators of social class or status and the many attitudes and behavior patterns that follow. Further, feelings about one's own class position complement these objective measures. When asked, "Do you feel that you belong to a social class?", 72% of users and 77% of non-users said "yes", and specified the class they felt they belonged to as in Table 6. The data confirm the more objective income and education measures of the users as "middle class."

TABLE 6

WHICH SOCIAL CLASS DO YOU BELONG TO?

	Users	Non-Users
Middle	44%	26%
Working	28	51
No answer	28	23

The occupational breakdown reflects the education and age of the respondents. Twenty percent of users' occupations are classed as "professional" (4%, non-users). Managers and other white collar jobs account for 25% of users; 20%, non-users. Skilled and unskilled labor and service work characterize 16% of users, 35% of non-users. Housewives constitute 24% of users and 22% of non-users. Ten percent of users are retired or unemployed as are 18% of non-users. Five percent of user respondents are students—none among the non-user group.

Mobility. Education is often directly related to "upward" mobility, the achievement of higher social status and income, and often it is related also to geographical mobility. Indeed, in North Carolina, discussions in the recent past with public librarians about the relatively transient status of public library patrons has often suggested that library users are a quite mobile group, that they are quite likely to be from "out of town" or from another state. In addition, probably because of their higher income, library users tend to travel more. The data from this survey bears out much of this assumption in several ways.

Table 7 shows that users have lived in more places than non-users—although the rate of "moving" is quite high for both groups! However, recall from an earlier section of this paper that the library's clientele is quite a bit younger than non-users and would seemingly have had less opportunity (time) to change residence. A correction for the age factor would suggest a quite higher mobility rate for users than shown in Table 7.

Moreover, the greater mobility of users is shown in other responses. When asked, "Do you expect to live here the rest of your life?", only 38% of users as contrasted with 54% of non-users replied "yes."

TABLE 7

NUMBER OF PLACES LIVED DURING ONE'S LIFE

	Users	Non-Users
No moves	3%	7%
1 or 2 moves	23	30
3 or 4 moves	30	27
5 or more moves	45	36

"Do you think of this as your hometown?" "Yes," said 70% of users and 87% of non-users. In addition, almost half (48%) of users' hometowns are actually outside of North Carolina in contrast with 36% of non-users. Namely, fifty percent more users' than non-users' hometowns are outside of North Carolina.

There are certain negative implications for the public library in the rate of residence change among its patrons. Some library directors have commented that newcomers are often accustomed to high quality library service and have been useful in promoting better libraries. However, a mobile clientele, in spite of being influential in the community due to its higher socioeconomic status, cannot provide the stable, continuing basis for popular support that might be forthcoming from natives or very long-term residents.

While everyone apparently travels quite widely, users again outpace non-users. If "travel is broadening," library users may indeed have greater interest in other peoples, places and times. On the other hand, the sizeable 21% of non-users who have been outside the United States may constitute a possible audience for the library's materials and services related to foreign travel experience. Indeed, the majority of people, by virtue of traveling 500 miles or more, may well have interests in other parts of the United States that could be satisfied by library use.

TABLE 8

LONGEST DISTANCE TRAVELED FROM PRESENT RESIDENCE

	Users	Non-Users
Less than 500 miles	9%	27%
500 miles or more	61	51
Outside United States, in North America	6	4
Outside United States, outside North America	24	17

Political Orientation

Several measures of political behavior show interesting similarities and differences between users and non-users. Their national and local choices of political parties are quite similar—both showing a strong degree of independence.

National Party Choice?

Users: 42% Democrat, 40% Independent, 14% Republican
Non-Users: 46% Democrat, 29% Independent, 16% Republican

Local Party Choice?

Users: 52% Democrat, 29% Independent, 14% Republican
Non-Users: 49% Democrat, 24% Independent, 17% Republican

When asked whom they would vote for in 1972 if Nixon were to run against (1) Humphrey and Wallace or (2) Edward Kennedy and Wallace or (3) Muskie and Wallace, library users "elected" Nixon against all sets of opponents. Non-users, however, gave a slight edge to Edward Kennedy (35%) over Nixon (33%) and Wallace (28%). The preference for Wallace in any case was never over 15% among users, but reached as high as 33% among non-users.

Another measure of political orientation is provided by one's location on a "conservative, liberal, independent" political scale. When asked how they considered themselves in these terms, the results were as follows:

	Users	Non-Users
Consider self conservative	34%	28%
Consider self liberal	22	15
Don't think of self this way	28	30
Middle of the road	13	8

Several conclusions may be drawn at this point. One, the differences in both party choice and "self-image" on the conservative -- liberal continuum are not very great. Exception to this lies only in a higher non-user preference for Wallace, at the expense of support for Nixon. Two, there is a strong streak of political independence avowed by both groups. Three, the considerable proportion identifying

themselves as "conservative" has some likely, if tenuous, implications for the public library vis à vis such issues as censorship. If, as conservatives, people consider the preservation and the retention of the age-old "right to read" (freedom of press, etc.) as important, the public library may feel relatively free from public pressure to censor. On the other hand, to many conservatives, innovative, candid or non-conformist literary themes and styles are considered beyond the pale of public support. To such people the public library must make its needs and position on censorship clear.

These general political indicators are perhaps not as useful to the library as are the measures of political *activities* and expectations on the *local* and *personal* level. The public library is, after all, primarily a community or local institution! Differences between users and non-users in voting behavior, for instance, are quite striking. Does the library have any influence on its clientele which is more active politically than non-users? Given the assumption that increased participation in voting and other political activity is rewarding to the community and is one of the goals of the library, it continues to be fruitful to consider the possibility of serving non-users to the end of improving their participation in the political process.

TABLE 9

POLITICAL ACTIVITY

	Users	Non-Users
Vote always or almost always	64%	47%
Often or always talking about politics	62	32
Work for party or candidate always or often	10	4
Try to convince anyone to vote for a certain party or candidate, always or often	22	13

Another question is potentially very useful in estimating the interest in and commitment to local public affairs, including the affairs of the local public library. Respondents were asked, "If, in person, you told local government officials what you wanted the community to do about some public question, do you think they would listen to you or not?

TABLE 10

RECEPTIVITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

	Users	Non-User
Officials would listen	46%	27%
Officials would NOT listen	36	50
Depends on issue; don't know	18	23

Since library users in North Carolina seem to feel more attuned to local government than do non-users, they are probably far more influential. Such influence, or leadership, in the community may develop from the fact that library users are more highly educated or have higher incomes than non-users. Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that library users are more involved in the community and expect to be influential. If such influence can be directed on behalf of the public library, the potential benefit could be significant.

Media and Information Uses

Indications that library users are more involved "politically" than non-users are consistent with their contrasting patterns of information resources. Further, the different functions of the different media for both groups is important—note especially the role of TV in Table 11.

"Did you read a newspaper yesterday or today?" "Yes," replied 87% of users and 62% of non-users.

"Did you read the editorials?" "Yes," said 45% of users and 21% of non-users.

The newspaper is a standard information source for a majority, but it serves different purposes—not only as reflected in reading editorial pages, but also in scale and scope as is shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11

NEWS SOURCES *

News About. . .	TV		Newspaper		Radio		Others/Mixed		Magazines	
	U	NU	U	NU	U	NU	U	NU	U	NU
	%		%		%		%		%	
Local Public Affairs	24	35	53	38	17	20	6	6	-	-
State Affairs	46	54	42	27	7	13	5	3	-	-
National Affairs	58	63	24	19	4	9	-	-	9	2
International Affairs	62	66	21	16	3	9	-	-	11	3

* U=Users; NU=Non-Users

Television is the primary, but hardly the exclusive, source of information about "public affairs" for both groups, except for "*local* public affairs" when the newspaper is paramount and the radio quite important. The more distant the "affairs" the more important is television. Note that magazines emerge as more important than radio for library users in covering national and international events, while magazines have little role to play in this regard for non-users. The strength of the newspaper drops dramatically with the distance of events for both groups. Considering the fine calibre of some of North Carolina's metropolitan dailies in their national and international coverage, including syndicated columnists—and the relative lack of depth in television coverage of nearly all events—the relative power of TV may tell us something about the orientation of even our library users toward printed materials.

That is, the library provides materials on public affairs in far greater depth than do newspapers and magazines. Yet the attraction of television is unquestioned. On the other hand, the precise use of television needs more clarification than we have data for here.

One further clue is provided by responses to the question, "Have you watched educational TV in the last day or two?" Only 22% of users said "Yes", only 10% of non-users. Among the small proportion who watch educational television 36% of library users are tuned in to children's programs, as are 44% of non-users. Thus, even among those few watching educational TV, only one-half to two-thirds are tuning in to cultural and informational types of programs—types that are close to the spirit of library service and collections.

Life-Style Indicators

Among the many variables measured and questions asked by the survey, a small selection was made that touched on four different areas of behavior and afforded us some additional perspectives on library users' interests in what here is termed loosely as "life style." The four areas are *church, family size, racial mix in schools,* and *differential values placed on boys' and girls' behavior.* These areas are certainly limited in defining the great scope of modern life, and the survey does not pretend to deal with them in depth. Nonetheless, attitudes toward these areas are salient for our time, for our understanding of public expectations, including those of the library's public. The information may assist in improving collections and services by improving the knowledge of actual and potential user social behavior.

Church. Perhaps least satisfactory among them, because it is a question people are prone to answer "yes" to, is the question, "Did you attend church last week?" "Yes," said 48% of library users ("No," 48%, no response, 4%). Non-users are apparently less likely to be as attached to a church–38% said "yes," 54%, "no," 8%, no response. Possibly the variation in church attendance between users and non-users is (as are so many other variables) due to socioeconomic or social class outlook–library patrons being largely middle-class.

Racial mix. Even if we expect that better-educated middle-class white people are, or at least claim to be, more liberal in terms of relationships with black people, our one question on this issue may be a surprising kind of confirmation.

TABLE 12

IF YOU COULD CHOOSE, WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST RACIAL MIX FOR YOUR CHILD IN SCHOOL?

	Users	Non-Users
All the same race as my child	15%	41%
Most the same race as my child	31	14
About ½ the same race as my child	34	26
Number of each race doesn't matter	12	10
No response	8	9

Recall that 84% of library user respondents were white, constituting an overrepresentation (non-users, 78% white). Any bias possibly attributable to the preference of greater—or less—racial mix by blacks is consequently not an explanation for these figures. The most striking result is that only 15% of library users would choose total segregation in contrast with 41% of non-users. On the other hand, a fourth of non-users and one-third of users would choose a 50-50 ratio. Since only 23% of the population in North Carolina is black, a 50% black student body is not *generally* likely.

Family Size. The size of one's family remains a growing critical issue in determining the life chances not only of the family as a unit itself, but also of individuals and of societies, North Carolina included. Religious, other ideological, and cultural values all play an important role in determining family size. Economists and ecologists may argue for either restricted or voluntary determination, often depending on a balance of short-run against long-run gains for society. In an individual's own life time at this point in history, short-run economic costs are very high for child-rearing and apparently will require an ever-increasing portion of family income. North Carolina's economy is at or near the bottom of the scale in comparison with the economies of other states, and the State's interest in family planning is closely related to its economic status. One of the most direct implications of the situation for the public library is its educational role. The costs of education generally are growing, and the length of time that children are economically dependent increases; consequently, far greater financial demands are made of parents.

The public library has something of a dilemma on its hands. Its costs are increasing, too, and its means of support are not increasing proportionately. At the same time, the needs of the public for more of the educational services that the library provides are growing. Clearly, the growth of population and of the State's economy, other variables notwithstanding, are in themselves of great importance for the future of the library.

Do library patrons with more income prefer larger families than the less affluent non-user group? Two questions in the survey probe the issue of how the population, as a whole, feels about family size. Table 13,Column I, tells us the response to, "What's the best number of children for a family to have?" A second question, "If you could

live your life over again, and everything such as money or living conditions were the same, how many children would you like to have?", puts the issue more squarely and personally in economic terms. Responses to it are in the same table, Column II.

TABLE 13

FAMILY SIZE - I: Best Number of Children for a Family
II: Number of Children I would have if I could live my life over again

Number of Children	Users		Non-Users	
	I	II	I	II
None or one	1%	5%	2%	5%
Two	41	47	26	32
Three	23	23	21	21
Four	17	13	27	23
Five	3	3	6	7
Six-ten	2	2	5	6
As many as you can afford	7	6	3	6
. . .depends. . .	5	6	10	6

Two conclusions emerge. One, given the "ideal" situation (Column I), non-users would prefer larger families than users. Although both groups tend to "hold the line" at three, 30% more library users do so (65% versus 49%). Two, when asked what they would do if they had their lives to live over again, with the same money and living conditions, *both* groups would have smaller families than is "best". However, if they could "do it over again," the more affluent user group seems to feel the economic pinch somewhat less; that is, 15% more would have none, one, two, or three children, while 21% more non-users would elect one of this family size.

Differential expectations of children by sex. The value that parents place on the interests of their children is important for understanding possible use of the library in their lives. Furthermore, it can be useful to know if adults' expectations of boys are different from those they have for girls. The interviewers asked, "What's most important in a boy—an interest in the way things happen or good manners?" They repeated the question, asking about girls.

TABLE 14

VALUES PLACED ON BOYS' BEHAVIOR

Behavior	Users	Non-Users
Interest in the way things happen	59%	26%
Good manners	21	47
Both	18	23

VALUES PLACED ON GIRLS' BEHAVIOR

Behavior	Users	Non-Users
Interest in the way things happen	49%	19%
Good manners	31	55
Both	19	22

The importance of the services the library has to offer presumably is greater for those valuing "the way things happen" than for those who emphasize "good manners." Non-users of the public library far prefer good manners over "learning" for girls—even if the "both" category is added to the "way things happen." Further, more than twice as many non-users as users prefer good manners over "learning" for boys. To the extent that parental and other adult expectations exp[illegible]in children's use of libraries—or other learning resources—a rather dismal picture is presented. Even among the well-educated library clientele, "good manners" are very highly stressed for girls at the expense of using the mind. Housewives, as noted earlier, comprised 22-24% of the respondents. Among them 37% of the user group and 36% of non-users had ever wanted a career outside the home. The domestic role remains powerful as a model for young women, the current "liberation" movement and high level of parental education notwithstanding.

Of course, children do depart from parents' values—some even to use the library! Further, were the question phrased differently, including other alternatives such as "being an athlete," and "being a scientist," different results might have been obtained-results more promising for the use of libraries. As they are, results show that the general attitudinal environment of the library implies low priority for those things that libraries can do. Put another way, while general public expectations may not be directly hostile to the library, they are *de facto* anti-intellectual by virtue of being quite indifferent to those things the library represents.

Summary and Conclusions

The library user population in North Carolina continues to be characteristically young, white, mobile, well-educated, and relatively well-to-do financially. These traits, coupled with a positive and active approach to politics, suggest that librarians wield a potentially powerful force in the community among their clientele, one that might be directed toward greater involvement in activities to enhance library support. Further, librarians may take satisfaction in serving the needs of people who, because of their community status, are likely to be leaders and influentials, hopefully for the general improvement of community life.

That most adults do not use the library is no surprise. Regrettably, it is not simply a majority; among those unserved are disproportionately large numbers of blacks and senior citizens, two groups that librarians have long sought to include in their public.

The public library perseveres in a time of considerable social and financial crisis. It requires ever more money to broaden the base of its services, both by increasing its patronage and upgrading its services. In spite of the many unsettling socioeconomic currents in modern life, there are also promises for improved conditions if librarians and their supporters can exploit the opportunities. Higher educational attainment and greater freedom, regardless of race and sex, count heavily toward creating a more positive environment for libraries.

* * *

Technological changes continue to constitute both problem and promise for libraries. Greater mobility has introduced traffic problems for locating libraries. Rising costs of printed materials and new costs for new kinds of media and their organization have brought on complex and demanding problems for library planning and growth. The public is still print-oriented, but it relies extensively on other media, especially television, which is still largely barren in comparison with the library's riches. Perhaps "cable television" can become the library's intervening factor in the pursuit of improving the quality of life. Although even library users are only marginally attached to "educational TV," the possibilities for "cable TV" are great. Lo-

cally oriented, "live" programs *can* be enormously attractive in helping fulfill the library's goals.

Librarians need not be passive before social facts or technological change. Knowing about them can make clearer the tasks necessary for developing services. After all, attitudes do change–including those towards boys' and girls' "learning the way things are." Public librarians can play a special role in both changing and fulfilling expectations. Hopefully, these data about the people of North Carolina will help direct family, community, and statewide efforts to learn "the way things happen."

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